

MISSOURI CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Missouri's "Lorax" Also Speaks for the Trees



Skip Mourglia, left, an NRCS forester, and Dick Boyt under one of Boyt's prized walnut trees in his forest.

"I am the Lorax," wrote Dr. Seuss. "I speak for the trees."

Perhaps it's just coincidence that R.D. "Dick" Boyt and his wife Libby moved to southwestern Missouri and purchased a 720-acre forest the same year that Dr. Seuss published his book "The Lorax." The message in the children's book published in 1971 is the need to care for the environment, especially by protecting trees from over harvest. "Grow a forest. Protect it from the axes that hack," the Lorax urges.

Dick Boyt couldn't agree more. The 81-year-old, retired college art instructor has been doing his part to grow and protect the forest near Neosho, Missouri, where he, Libby and three of their four surviving children still live.

Boyt's passion for trees was evident in February when he gave a rousing, 20-minute speech while accepting the 2006 Missouri Tree Farmers of the Year award. It's also evident in the series of papers he has written on the benefits of healthy forests.

"I don't know where my love affair with trees, particularly walnut, started," he says. "I'm very concerned about the environment, global warming, carbon dioxide. What I'm doing here with this one forest might be like trying to bail out an ocean with a teaspoon or heating the world with a candle. Green plants are the principal things that remove carbon dioxide from the air, and trees are at the top. We need to keep forest lands in forest, number one. And secondly, we need to make new forests. I can't think of anything else that I can do that can help to heal the environment.

"When you grow old, you begin to ask the questions, 'What did I do?' 'What legacy am I leaving behind?'"

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There's little question about what legacy Boyt will leave behind. He started forming it a year after purchasing Pottershop Tree Farm. At that time, he and Libby were offered twice what they paid for the property by a man who wanted to clear the trees and plant fescue for cattle. The Boyts did not sell their farm, but some of their neighbors did. Pottershop Tree Farm is now nearly surrounded by pasture.



NRCS representatives Skip Mourglia and Lynn Jenkins (in front of tree) have provided technical and financial assistance to help the Boyt's care for their forest. Representing the Boyt family are (standing from left) Peter Boyt, Dick Boyt and Dave Boyt.

Meanwhile, Boyt and his sons Art, Dave and Peter are doing their part to not only keep their managed forest intact, but to improve it. Their actions are supported by Elizabeth, the Boyts' daughter who lives in Kentucky.

"There are 80 acres of forest next to us that I've been thinking of buying," Dick says. "I told the kids that we had saved up some money and we could either divide that money up among them or we could buy more forest land. Without hesitation, they unanimously said, 'Buy the land.'"

Louise A. "Skip" Mourglia, a forester working for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) out of its Southwest Missouri Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) project office, has worked with the Boyts for several years. She has jointly provided forest management assistance to the Boyts, along with Gary Smith, Missouri Department of Conservation forester.

Recently Mourglia has linked the Boyts with an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract that provides funding to assist with forest stand improvement and tree planting on 80 acres.

"On those 80 acres, they have completed a selective commercial harvest, and will expand upon that by removing some less-desirable, non-commercial trees to free up growing space for better-quality crop trees and new oak seedlings," Mourglia says.

Mourglia says there was a time when Dick Boyt was hesitant about cutting a live tree. She says when droughts, tree aging, forest diseases and insects converged on this large forest, it was time to begin resurrecting it through harvesting and timber stand improvement. Mourglia says Dick realized it was time to change strategies.

"They've had several timber sales now because Mother Nature has forced it upon them," she says.

Mourglia says it's refreshing to see the "conservation mindset" of the whole family.



“They have such a love for their property and such a great deal of respect for the natural processes,” she says. “They like to set an example for other people.”

Dave Boyt, who has a forestry degree, says his father certainly has set an example for him.

“Plant a tree.
Plant a bunch
of trees!”

~ R.D. “Dick” Boyt

“A lot of what Dad does rubs off on me,” he says. Dave adds that caring for the forest is instrumental in keeping it intact.

“I’m thinking along the same terms as Dad. We have a generation that we need to pass it on to as well. The only way it will have value when we pass it on is if it’s in good shape.”

Pete says he hopes that he and his siblings are successful in passing the family’s conservation mindset on to Dick and Libby’s eight grandchildren.

“Dad’s instilled a philosophy into us that we want to carry on into the future and instill in our children as well. It’s that the forest is not just for lumber; we need to utilize the forest completely,” Pete says. “I’ll feel successful if I can pass that on to my children.”

Dick Boyt already has been successful in passing his legacy on to his children. For other people, he has a simple request.

“Plant a tree. Plant a bunch of trees!” he says.

Probably not even The Lorax could speak for the trees any better than Dick Boyt.

*Written by Charlie Rahm
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